

Rappahannock Christian Church – 7/31/11

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Communion Meditation

Why did Jesus come? Why did He have to leave His throne in glory, come to this earth and become the incarnate, the en-fleshed, Word of God? It is a mystery that we cannot fully understand.

The Apostle Paul does take a stab at it, however, when he says that sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and just as one man's sin resulted in condemnation for all, so also in the righteous act of Christ all may be made alive. (Romans 5)

Since condemnation and sin came through a human being, a human being also had to take the penalty. This explains some of it at least. A human sinned. God had to take human flesh so that He could suffer the punishment for us. As we gather at this Table, these Elements remind us that this is true. Let me read the words from the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 26:26-29 – While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

Does God Have A Problem?

The Scripture reading for this morning comes from the 10th chapter of Romans. This is in the middle of a section of this letter (chapters 9-11) and deals with a particular issue.

Romans 10:1-13 – Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is

Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Well, I would like to ask you what concerns you most today? What occupies your energies and your mind?

I think the Apostle Paul, here in this section of Romans, has a very specific concern on his mind.

Now remember, Paul is an evangelist. He is *driven* to convert people to Jesus Christ. That has become his life's work. God has used him successfully, and he is seeing the Church grow by leaps and bounds. Paul has noticed that, as time passes, fewer and fewer Jews are coming to Jesus. It seems that the Jews, for the most part, are rejecting their Messiah, and this really troubles him.

Of course, Paul is happy that God has allowed the gospel message to be preached to the Gentiles (the non-Jews) and that so many of them are coming to the Lord. At the same time, he is saddened that his own Jewish brethren are not responding the way he, and others, had hoped. Not only so, but it actually seems odd, it is unexpected -- and it causes a problem.

Here it is: Weren't the Jews God's chosen people? Didn't God promise the New Covenant, the Messiah, God's kingdom, to *them*? Shouldn't they, then, be leading the way?

IF God is sovereign... *IF* He chose the Jews... *IF* He promised them salvation through the Messiah... *IF* YOUR GOSPEL, Paul, is true, then *WHY* isn't God's plan working out? Are we seeing God's word fail right before our eyes? What's the problem? Is God weak? Is He unable to fulfill the promises He made? Did God get it wrong from the beginning? Maybe God should never have made those promises. Perhaps God did not realize, He did not foresee, that the Jews would turn a deaf ear to Jesus and the Apostles. How can we explain God's (apparent) failure?

I think Paul was hearing these questions and accusations both from within the Church and from the Jews. They are very serious, and Paul feels that he has to address them.

There are several good answers Paul might have given. He might have said:

- God gave people free will. It's not His fault if the Jews reject Him.
- Not ALL of the Jews have rejected Jesus, after all. I have accepted Him, and I am a Jew. Peter is a Jew. Thousands of Jews *have* accepted Jesus.
- Besides, when was there ever a time when every last man, woman and child in Israel believed? It has never happened! On the contrary, most of the time God has had only a tiny remnant of genuine believers. This is the story of Israel's history, and it is what we should expect to see today.

But this is not the answer Paul gives in Romans 9-11. Instead, he says, “Look, when you read those Old Testament promises you must understand them now in light of Jesus’

declaration, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' When you read those promises to 'Israel' in the Old Testament you should not be thinking in the old way. If you are only thinking of 'Israel' as a political state, located on a piece of land in Palestine; if you are thinking only about the biological descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you are going to misunderstand the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New, and you are going to miss the fulfillment of God's word."

In the New Testament "Israel" does not always refer to the political state of Israel. It does not always refer to the biological descendants of Abraham. The true "sons of Abraham" are those who believe God and are justified by faith! Under the New Covenant there is no Jew or Gentile. There are just believers and non-believers. Those who believe are the new chosen people -- the "elect." They are the true Israel, the ones through whom God is fulfilling His promises. As Paul puts it in Galatians 6, they are "the Israel of God."

So no, God's word has not failed. The promises that God would make a New Covenant with his people and would establish an eternal kingdom, promises made to "Israel" in the Old Testament, are being fulfilled in and through the new Israel, the Israel of God -- Christ's Church.

Now, Paul still wishes that more Jews would find salvation in Christ. This is natural. As a Jew, he has a special connection with his fellow Jews. He wants to see them become complete in Christ. But their refusal to accept the Gospel is by no means God's fault. It does not mean that God's promises have failed. God knew what was coming. He knew that the New Covenant would be based on faith and not on works. Those who are included in the Kingdom are those who have received, by faith, God's offer of forgiveness and life. It is each individual's choice.

How blessed we are to be able to look back and to see how God has fulfilled His promises, and how He continues to fulfill His great promise of a new kingdom even today, even in us, as we, the Church are a part of His plan.

Benediction

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. – Psalm 19:14